



United States Department of Agriculture

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United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Office of the Chief  
Information Officer

1400 Independence  
Avenue SW  
Washington, DC  
20250

March 28, 2019

**Delivered via Electronic Mail**

Austin R. Evers  
Executive Director  
American Oversight  
1875 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.  
1030 15th St NW,  
Washington, DC 20005  
Email: foia@americanoversight.org

**RE: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request 2019-DA-00459-F  
Final Response**

Dear Mr. Evers,

This is the final response to the October 10, 2018, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Departmental FOIA Office (DFO). The request sought the following

“All e-mail communications from September 1, 2018, through September 30, 2018, between all political appointees in the following USDA offices:

- a) The immediate Office of the Secretary;
- b) The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights;
- c) The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations;
- d) The Office of the Under Secretary for Food Safety;
- e) The immediate Office of the Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation;
- f) The Risk Management Agency; and
- g) The Farm Service Agency’s Office of the State Executive Director of North Carolina,

And any of the following entities or individuals representing these entities:

- i) The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, including anyone whose email address ends in @ncdenr.gov;
- ii) The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, including anyone whose email address ends in @dhhs.nc.gov;

Austin R. Evers  
FOIA Case No. 2019-DA-00459-F

- iii) The North Carolina Pork Council (NCPC), including Andy Curliss, Jan Archer, and anyone whose email address ends in @ncpork.org;
- iv) The National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), including John Weber, Neil Dierks, Michael Formica, Tom Hebert, Nick Giordano, and anyone whose email address ends in @nppc.org;
- v) Smithfield Foods, Inc., including Michael Skahill and anyone whose email address ends in @smithfield.com or @smithfieldfoods.com;
- vi) Murphy-Brown, LLC, including anyone whose email address ends in @murphybrownllc.com; or
- vii) The National Pork Board, including Bill Even, Steve Rommereim, Deborah Ballance, Terry O'Neel, Brett Kaysen, Scott Phillips, Heather Hill, and anyone whose email address ends in @pork.org”

The request has been processed under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

A search for responsive records was conducted by the Office of the Chief Information Officer's (OCIO) telecommunications provider, Client Experience Center (CEC). The CEC performs network services for the OCIO to include electronic messaging operations, electronic calendars, blackberry, mobile device management (MDM), file and print, remote access, voice, network, service desk, and other application services. The CEC located thirty-four (34) pages of responsive records.

Following a review of the responsive records, the DFO has determined that certain information contained therein should be withheld pursuant to 5 U.S.C. §552(b)(6) (FOIA Exemption 6). Below is an explanation of the information that has been withheld.

#### **FOIA Exemption 6**

Exemption 6 generally is referred to as the “personal privacy” exemption. It provides that the disclosure requirements of FOIA do not apply to “personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” Application of the exemption involves balancing the public’s interest in disclosure against individuals’ privacy interests.

The information withheld under Exemption 6 consists of cell phone numbers and certain email addresses. This information qualifies as “similar files” because it is information in which individuals have a privacy interest. Moreover, releasing the cell phone numbers

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and email addresses could subject the individuals to unwarranted or unsolicited communications. Because there is a viable privacy interest that would be threatened by disclosure, Exemption 6 authorizes this office to withhold the information. Accordingly, we have determined that the public interest in the information's release does not outweigh the overriding privacy interests in keeping it confidential.

You may appeal this response by email at [USDAFOIA@ocio.usda.gov](mailto:USDAFOIA@ocio.usda.gov), or by mail to the Assistant Secretary for Administration at 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Whitten Building, Room 209-A, Washington, D.C. 20250-0103. Your appeal must be in writing, and it must be received no later than 90 calendar days from the date of this letter. The DFO will not consider appeals received after the 90 calendar day limit. Appeals received after 5:00 p.m. EST will be considered received the next business day. The appeal letter should include the FOIA tracking number listed above, a copy of the original request, the DFO's response to your original request, and a statement explaining the basis of your appeal. For quickest possible handling, the subject line of your email, the appeal letter, and its envelope, if applicable, should be marked "Freedom of Information Act Appeal."

You may seek dispute resolution services from the DFO's FOIA Public Liaison, Ms. Ravoyne Payton at [USDAFOIA@ocio.usda.gov](mailto:USDAFOIA@ocio.usda.gov).

Additionally, you may contact the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) at the National Archives and Records Administration to inquire about the FOIA mediation services they offer. The contact information for the OGIS is as follows: Office of Government Information Services, National Archives and Records Administration, Room 2510, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, Maryland 20740-6001; email at [ogis@nara.gov](mailto:ogis@nara.gov); telephone at 202-741-5770; toll-free at 1-877-684-6448; or facsimile at 202-741-5769.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Mr. Randolph Ballard at 202-205-9548 or electronically at [randolph.ballard@usda.gov](mailto:randolph.ballard@usda.gov) or [USDAFOIA@ocio.usda.gov](mailto:USDAFOIA@ocio.usda.gov).

The DFO Team appreciates the opportunity to assist you in this matter.

Sincerely,

*Alexis R. Graves*

Alexis R. Graves  
Departmental FOIA Officer  
Office of the Chief Information Officer

Enclosure: Responsive Records (34 pages)

**From:** Andy Curliss  
**Sent:** Monday, September 17, 2018 9:50 PM  
**To:** Andy Curliss  
**BCC:** Starling, Raymond - OSEC, Washington, DC  
**Subject:** [CAUTION: Suspicious Link]Corrected advisory Sept. 17 at 9 p.m. -- hog and pig count had dropped digit in the online version sent previously (has been updated online and in attached document)  
**Attachments:** Public Advisory 5a.pdf

**PROCEED WITH CAUTION:** This message triggered warnings of **potentially** malicious web content. Evaluate this email by considering whether you are expecting the message, along with inspection for suspicious links.

Questions: Spam.Abuse@wdc.usda.gov

Link:

<http://www.ncpork.org/advisory5/>

## Advisory on Hurricane Florence – Sept. 17 at 9 p.m.

Posted on [September 17, 2018](#)



The historic flooding in the aftermath of Hurricane Florence has continued to cause widespread impacts across eastern North Carolina, including affecting at least a dozen of our hog farms.

Significant efforts continue in order to provide feed and care for animals and to ensure safety for farm families and employees.

We are currently aware of the following impacts:

- One lagoon breach occurred on a small farm in Duplin County. An on-site inspection showed that solids remained in the lagoon. The roof of an empty barn on the farm

was also damaged. A photograph of the lagoon and barns, taken today, is provided below.

- Four lagoons have been inundated by flood waters.
- Seven lagoons are at capacity due to rainfall and appear to have overtopped.

We do not believe, based on on-farm assessments to date and industrywide surveying, that there are widespread impacts to the more than 2,100 farms with more than 3,000 anaerobic treatment lagoons in the state. Waters from the record-shattering storm are rising in some places and receding in others, and we expect further impacts to be reported as conditions and access allows.

### **A note to the media**

We will continue to provide advisory updates as soon as is practicable.

Communications in the field remain sporadic and our primary attention remains on logistical and operational support.

We are providing additional information and resources below.

### **Key terms**

We track the U.S. EPA and state of North Carolina terminology.

**Lagoons:** Waste from hog farms is treated in anaerobic lagoons, then applied to nearby fields as fertilizer on a crop in accordance with strict state regulations. “Lagoon” is not a term created by the pork industry. It reflects the language used by the EPA to describe these treatment systems. It is incorrect to refer to hog lagoons as cesspools, which is a separate treatment system.

**Breach:** A breach is a structural failure of a lagoon — the lagoon walls give way and no longer hold back all of the lagoon contents. This is rare. During Hurricane Matthew, one farm experienced a partial lagoon breach. During Hurricane Floyd, six lagoons were breached.

**Inundation:** When heavy rains cause major rivers to overflow, entire communities can be inundated with water. When a lagoon is inundated, the walls remain intact, but floodwater rises over the sides and fills the lagoon. By design, solids are stored and remain at the bottom of the lagoon, and the liquids at the top are heavily diluted, minimizing the environmental impact.

**Overtop:** Severe, heavy rainfall may cause a lagoon to reach capacity and overflow, or overtop. Every hog farm in the state must maintain a minimum buffer of 19 inches to allow for significant rain events. This buffer is known as **freeboard** and it is designed to minimize the risk of a lagoon overtopping. Many lagoons maintain much more freeboard space, especially as hurricane season approaches.

### **Photos of hog farm conditions**

At top left, farm with a lagoon breach and damaged empty barn in Duplin County (separately provided below). Photo at bottom right is from Sampson County.



#### **Jones County photo**

The Associated Press published a photo on Sunday, Sept. 16, of a farm with an inundated lagoon in Jones County. We received numerous inquiries about the status of the farm. The water surrounding the barns was not deep and there has been continued access to the barns. At right, is a photo taken at the barns on the morning of Monday, Sept. 17.



*A hog farm is inundated with floodwaters from Hurricane Florence near Trenton, N.C., Sunday, Sept. 16, 2018. (AP Photo/Steve Helber)*



The AP also published the photo below, though many other media outlets did not publish it online or in print.



#### **Duplin County photo**

Duplin County hog farm with a lagoon breach and damaged empty barn photographed Sept. 17, 2018. Breach is shown at top right of lagoon.



#### **In context: Hurricane Matthew**

To put the damage from Hurricane Florence in context, it may be useful to consider the impact caused by Hurricane Matthew in 2016. That was an equally devastating storm that caused more than \$1 billion in damage and resulted in 26 deaths in North Carolina.

Since Hurricane Floyd in 1999, the industry has taken significant steps to minimize the threat of flooding on North Carolina hog farms. This includes [the permanent closing of 334 hog lagoons](#) located in flood plains.

#### **Impact on Hog Farms by Hurricane Matthew**

- 1 partial lagoon breach on an inactive hog farm
- 14 lagoons inundated by floodwaters
- No lagoons overtopped
- No impact to more than 99.5% of active lagoons in North Carolina

### **Impact on Municipal Wastewater Treatment Plants**

Municipal wastewater treatment plants spilled more than 154 million gallons of raw, untreated human waste into the state's waterways.

### **State: Hurricane Matthew had “Minimal and Temporary” Impact on Water Quality**

Following Hurricane Matthew, the Division of Water Resources conducted extensive monitoring of waterways across eastern North Carolina. [Link to the complete report](#).

It reached the following conclusion:

*“After reviewing the data collected, and comparing that to precipitation amounts, river levels and known areas of flooding, the overall impacts of Hurricane Matthew on surface water quality were initially minimal and temporary, and the long-term effects appear to be similar to previous storms and long-term historical conditions. While many eastern North Carolina areas were inundated by floodwaters and incidents of spills, breaches or waste facility shutdowns were reported, the amount of water discharged into the river basins resulted in a diluting effect, which primarily resulted in lower than normal concentrations of various pollutants.”*

### **North Carolina hog farms**

#### **N.C. Hog Farms**

- More than 2,100 permitted hog farms
- More than 3,300 active lagoons
- No hog farms have been built in North Carolina since 1997

#### **N.C. Swine Inventory (June 2018)**

- Under 50 pounds:3.3 million (37%)
- 50-119 pounds:1.7 million (19%)
- 120-179 pounds:1.7 million (19%)
- 180+ pounds:1.3 million (15%)
- Breeding Stock: 900,000 (10%)
- Total:9 million

### **A word of caution**

We urge the media to exercise caution when reporting about impacts of Hurricane Florence on North Carolina hog farms. In advance of the storm, and since its onset, the North

Carolina Pork Council has seen widespread instances of inaccurate reporting in the media about the pork industry.

In previous years, we have seen photos of municipal waste plants, poultry houses and other agricultural facilities inaccurately labeled as pig farms. We have seen barns that have been empty for multiple years characterized as active hog farms. We urge caution, especially in a breaking news environment where initial information is often inaccurate.

It is precisely in these first hours and days that activists with an agenda seek to exploit the media – or the media simply gets it wrong. Our request: Beware of what you hear about hog farms during Hurricane Florence.

### Additional information

Hog farms & hurricanes: <http://www.ncpork.org/primer/>

Matthew, and buyouts: <http://www.ncpork.org/buyout/>

Beware of misleading agendas: <http://www.ncpork.org/beware/>

The storm's threat: <http://www.ncpork.org/concern/>

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Andy Curliss  
CEO  
North Carolina Pork Council  
o: (b) (6)  
f: 919.510.8546  
t: @ (b) (6)





### ADVISORY – SEPT. 17, 2018, at 9 p.m.

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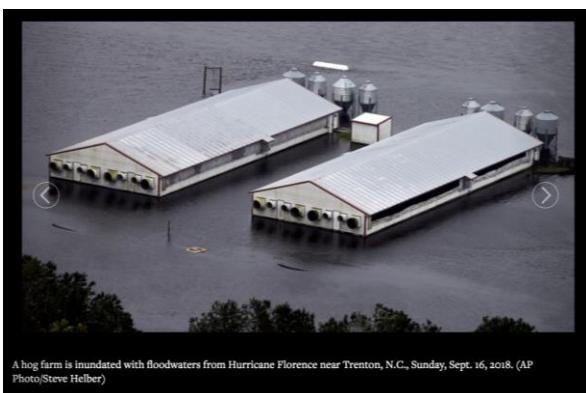
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Beware of misleading agendas: <http://www.ncpork.org/beware/>

The storm's threat: <http://www.ncpork.org/concern/>

**From:** Andy Curliss  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 12, 2018 8:25 AM  
**To:** raymond.starling@osec.usda.gov  
**Subject:** [CAUTION: Suspicious Link]Hurricane Florence update  
**Attachments:** MEDIA ADVISORY Sept 11.pdf

**PROCEED WITH CAUTION:** This message triggered warnings of **potentially** malicious web content. Evaluate this email by considering whether you are expecting the message, along with inspection for suspicious links.

Questions: Spam.Abuse@wdc.usda.gov

Main points:

- North Carolina hog farmers are prepared.
- Animals in many flood prone areas have been moved out.
- Feed supplies are in place in anticipation of extended roadblocks.
- Fuel sources are in place to run farms in extended outages.
- Lagoon levels assessed, and 25 inches of rain can be handled – much more in many places.
- Industry fared well in Matthew, which brought historic floods in 2016.
- We urge caution by media in reporting as activist groups are seeking to exploit the storm for their agenda.

Releases below in a series and attached is a PDF advisory with links to each.

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## N.C. hog farmers make final preparations in advance of Hurricane Florence

Posted on [September 11, 2018](#)



***Farmers have taken measures to protect livestock, manage lagoon levels in anticipation of impacts***

Hog farmers across Eastern North Carolina are making final preparations for the forecast arrival of Hurricane Florence. Farmers have taken precautions to protect animals, manage lagoons and prepare for power outages that are anticipated from the major hurricane, which is forecast to bring more than 15 inches of rain and high winds to many of the state's largest pig- and hog-producing counties.

Actions that farmers are taking include:

- **Shifting animals to higher ground.** Farmers and integrators are working to move animals out of barns in known flood-prone areas, shifting them to other farms to prevent animal mortality.
- **Ensuring feed supplies are in place.** Farmers and integrators are taking precautions to ensure ample feed provisions are on farms in anticipation of impassable roadways.
- **Preparing for power outages.** Farmers are securing generators and fuel supplies to respond to extended power outages.
- **Assessing lagoon levels.** Farmers have carefully managed their lagoons throughout the summer growing season, using their manure as a crop fertilizer. Every hog farm lagoon is required to maintain a minimum buffer to account for major flood events. Farmers across the major production areas of North Carolina are reporting current lagoon storage levels that can accommodate more than 25 inches of rain, with many reporting capacity volumes far beyond that.

“Our farmers and others in the pork industry are working together to take precautions that will protect our farms, our animals and our environment,” said Brandon Warren, President of the North Carolina Pork Council and a hog farmer from Sampson County. “The preparations for a hurricane began long before the past few hours or days. Our farmers take hurricane threats extremely seriously. We are continuing this work until the storm will force us inside.”

These same actions served the industry well during historic flooding brought by Hurricane Matthew in 2016.

Despite dire predictions from activist environmental groups, North Carolina farmers were well prepared for Hurricane Matthew when it arrived in October 2016. Even with record rainfall, only one lagoon experienced structural damage – and that was on a farm that had not housed any animals for more than five years.

An additional 14 lagoons were inundated with floodwater — compared to 55 during Hurricane Floyd in 1999 — but more than 3,750 other lagoons did not experience any flooding at all.

Following Hurricane Matthew, the Division of Water Resources conducted extensive monitoring of waterways across Eastern North Carolina. It reached the following conclusion:

*“After reviewing the data collected, and comparing that to precipitation amounts, river levels and known areas of flooding, the overall impacts of Hurricane Matthew on surface water quality were initially minimal and temporary, and the long-term effects appear to be similar to previous storms and long-term historical conditions. While many eastern North Carolina*

areas were inundated by floodwaters and incidents of spills, breaches or waste facility shutdowns were reported, the amount of water discharged into the river basins resulted in a diluting effect, which primarily resulted in lower than normal concentrations of various pollutants.”

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## Hurricane Matthew impact was minimal for our industry, and buyout program continues

Posted on [September 11, 2018](#)



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An additional 14 lagoons that were inundated with floodwater — compared to 55 during Hurricane Floyd in 1999 — but more than 3,750 other lagoons avoided any flooding.

Following Hurricane Matthew, the Division of Water Resources conducted extensive monitoring of waterways across eastern North Carolina. It reached the following conclusion:

*“After reviewing the data collected, and comparing that to precipitation amounts, river levels and known areas of flooding, the overall impacts of Hurricane Matthew on surface water quality were initially minimal and temporary, and the long-term effects appear to be similar to previous storms and long-term historical conditions. While many eastern North Carolina areas were inundated by floodwaters and incidents of spills, breaches or waste facility shutdowns were reported, the amount of water discharged into the river basins resulted in a diluting effect, which primarily resulted in lower than normal concentrations of various pollutants.”*

Other effects of Matthew were devastating, with the loss in North Carolina of 26 lives and more than \$1 billion in damage. Municipal waste systems failed across the eastern part of the state, spilling more than 154 million gallons of raw, untreated human waste into the state's waterways.

### **Buyout program continues**

The pork industry has continued to work closely with the state of North Carolina and individual hog farmers to mitigate the risk of flooding on farms during extreme weather events.

The N.C. Swine Floodplain Buyout Program, created in 1999, has invested more than \$18 million to close 103 hog lagoons located in the 100-year floodplain. An additional 231 out-of-service lagoons were permanently closed through grants from the N.C. Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation.

This year, the pork industry helped secure nearly \$5 million in additional funding from the state and federal sources for another round of voluntary buyouts of swine farms located in the 100-year floodplain. This funding will be used to close lagoons and acquire voluntary conservation easements that allow the farmer to retain farm ownership. Land within the easements can no longer be used for animal agriculture but may be used for growing row crops, planting trees and other low-intensity agriculture activities.

"We worked hard to secure this funding because our members care deeply about the land and water," said Andy Curliss, CEO of the North Carolina Pork Council, said earlier in 2018. "This closure program, which has been unanimously supported by our board of directors, is a profound example of the many efforts by the pork industry in North Carolina to reduce even the possibility of harm."

The N.C. Pork Council recognized the effectiveness of the buyout program following Hurricane Matthew and immediately began seeking funding to continue the program, which had not received any new funding since 2007.

N.C. Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler committed to seek a federal grant and matching funds to support the buyout program.

Earlier this year, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service awarded a \$2.49 million grant to the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Soil and Water Conservation. Total funding of about \$5 million for the program will be administered by NCDA&CS.

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## **Hog farms & hurricanes: A**

# primer on lagoons and flooding

Posted on [September 11, 2018](#)



When a hurricane hits, you may find many hog farms under water — except for the barns and lagoons. In some cases, the barn and lagoon are a tiny island of dry land, accessible only by boat. It is by design that the barns and the lagoons are built on the highest point of the farm. This protects pigs from flood waters and protects lagoons from being inundated with water. Lagoons are built up with high berms on each side to provide additional protection from flood waters.

Those unfamiliar with hog farms may not understand the differences between various terms used to describe what happens to hog lagoons during severe rain events.

Here is a guide.

## Useful Definitions

### **Lagoons That Overflow / Overtop**

On rare occasions, heavy rainfall may cause a lagoon to reach capacity and overflow. Every hog farm in the state must maintain a minimum buffer of 19 inches to allow for significant rain events. This minimizes the risk of a lagoon overflowing. It is rare for a farm to have only 19 inches of buffer. Many have a capacity far greater at all times, especially as the peak of hurricane season approaches.

### **Lagoons That Are Flooded / Inundated**

When heavy rains cause major rivers to overflow, entire communities can be inundated with water. This happened during historic rainfalls with both Hurricane Floyd (1999) and Hurricane Matthew (2016). When communities are inundated with flood waters, no business is safe, including hog farms. During Hurricane Matthew, 14 lagoons were inundated with flood waters. When a lagoon is inundated, the walls remain intact, but floodwater rises over the sides and fills the lagoon. This does not cause a catastrophic environment effect. By design, solids are stored and remain at the bottom of the lagoon, and the liquids at the top are heavily diluted, minimizing the environmental impact.

### **Lagoons That Are Breached**

A breach is a structural failure of a hog lagoon — the lagoon walls give way and can no longer hold back the lagoon contents. This is rare. During Hurricane Matthew, one farm experienced a partial lagoon breach, but it had not housed animals for more than five years.

### Understanding Photos

**Here is an example of a lagoon that is working properly.**

This photo shows how hog lagoons (identified by the appropriately pinkish tint) successfully withstood the rising flood waters and worked as intended. Notice the outline of the berm that separates the lagoon water from the flood waters. There is no mixing of waters and environmental impact is minimized.

**Here is a lagoon that has been inundated with flood waters.**

When a river overflowed during Hurricane Matthew, it flooded, or inundated, this hog farm. The lagoon walls remain intact. Only the top layer of lagoon water is mixing with floodwaters. Solids remain at the bottom, and environmental impact is minimized.



### About lagoons

#### **Anaerobic lagoons**

The anaerobic lagoons used on many pig and hog farms in North Carolina are also used by other industries and some municipalities in the state. In the case of farms, the scientific treatment system is purposefully designed to capture and store the manure and water from the barns. The stored effluent is then applied as a natural fertilizer on a green and growing crop at agronomic rates that are regulated and monitored.

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# Beware of misleading narratives and check facts on hog farms

Posted on [September 11, 2018](#)



While farmers across the state are working long hours to brace for the arrival of Hurricane Florence, there has been another group working equally hard in its ongoing efforts to damage the state's pork industry. As soon as the hurricane hits, the Waterkeeper Alliance, Mercy for Animals and other activist environmental and anti-agriculture groups have already indicated they intend to be out in full force to seize on the storm.

We urge caution.

Beware what they say.

It's already begun, and it is only expected to increase.

This is shameful, and a reminder is in order.

In the days leading up to and then following Hurricane Matthew in 2016, these activists sounded repeated alarms about the damage that would result from flooded hog farms. However, their claims were untrue. Even when the rains were much worse than predicted, North Carolina hog farms survived with significantly less damage than previous storms.

More than 99.5 percent of hog lagoons in North Carolina survived Matthew with no damage. A total of 14 lagoons — compared to 55 during Hurricane Floyd in 1999 — were inundated with floodwaters that devastated entire communities. That means more than 3,750 lagoons worked exactly how they were designed to work.

Nonetheless, the Waterkeeper Alliance, a group that is advancing an agenda against agriculture, continued to push a narrative about flooded hog farms. They took reporters on flights across North Carolina and shared photos of what they claimed were flooded hog farms.

In at least one instance, it wasn't true and the Washington Post fell for it.



Sources: North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources and National Weather Service

THE WASHINGTON POST

This photo published by the Washington Post is of a municipal waste plant, not a hog farm. The Washington Post later retracted, but this significant error occurred because it relied on the Waterkeeper Alliance for information. The Post published in print and online a photo of a purportedly flooded hog farm that was provided by the Waterkeepers. But it wasn't a hog farm at all. It was the Town of Hookerton's municipal waste water treatment facility. (Hookerton is one of several towns that use the same type of lagoon and sprayfield systems you find on hog farms.)

The Post later retracted the photo.

The Waterkeepers also spoke about the "millions" of livestock — pigs and poultry — that died from flooding during Hurricane Matthew. But that wasn't accurate either.

Only one farm had pigs that died from flooding during Hurricane Matthew. The 2,800 pigs that perished was unfortunate, but it certainly wasn't "millions."

And forecasts by these activists of environmental damage were likewise untrue.

Following Hurricane Matthew, the Division of Water Resources conducted extensive monitoring of waterways across eastern North Carolina. It reached the following conclusion:

*"After reviewing the data collected, and comparing that to precipitation amounts, river levels and known areas of flooding, the overall impacts of Hurricane Matthew on surface water quality were initially minimal and temporary, and the long-term effects appear to be similar to previous storms and long-term historical conditions. While many eastern North Carolina areas were inundated by floodwaters and incidents of spills, breaches or waste facility shutdowns were reported, the amount of water discharged into the river basins resulted in a diluting effect, which primarily resulted in lower than normal concentrations of various pollutants."*

**Use appropriate caution, especially in a breaking news environment where initial information is often inaccurate.**

**It is precisely in these first hours and days that activists with an agenda seek to exploit the media.**

**Our request: Beware of what you hear about hog farms during Hurricane Florence.**

--

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**Sept. 11, 2018**

Contact:

Jennifer Kendrick

Communications and Outreach manager

[\(b\)@ncpork.org](mailto:(b)@ncpork.org)

(Email is requested due to volume and ongoing preparations)

#### **MEDIA ADVISORY**

The following resources are available in regard to Hurricane Florence's approach.

Additional updates will be posted to <http://www.ncpork.org/news/> or at our blog, Beyond Bacon, found at <http://www.ncpork.org/category/beyond-bacon-the-blog/>

#### **Statement on hurricane preparations**

Farmers are shifting animals from flood-prone areas, ensuring feed supplies in place

<http://www.ncpork.org/prepared/>

#### **A primer on lagoons and flooding**

Many are unfamiliar with anaerobic lagoon design and terminology in storm events. Here is a guide.

<http://www.ncpork.org/primer/>

#### **Matthew, and the buyout program**

Here is factual information about Matthew and the buyout program

<http://www.ncpork.org/buyout/>

#### **Beware of misleading agendas**

We are already seeing inaccurate information. We urge continued caution of claims about our farms.

<http://www.ncpork.org/beware/>

**From:** Andy Curliss  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 16, 2018 9:32 PM  
**To:** Andy Curliss  
**BCC:** Starling, Raymond - OSEC, Washington, DC  
**Subject:** [CAUTION: Suspicious Link]NC Pork Council Advisory - Sept. 16 at 9 p.m.  
**Attachments:** PUBLIC ADVISORY 3.pdf

**PROCEED WITH CAUTION:** This message triggered warnings of **potentially** malicious web content. Evaluate this email by considering whether you are expecting the message, along with inspection for suspicious links.

Questions: Spam.Abuse@wdc.usda.gov

<http://www.ncpork.org/advisory3/>

## Advisory on Hurricane Florence – Sept. 16 at 9 p.m.

Posted on September 16, 2018



Hog farmers in North Carolina are watching with great concern the still-rising flood waters brought by the historic impact of Hurricane Florence. Efforts continue in affected areas to provide feed and care for animals, and fuel to power farms, while ensuring safety for our farm families and farm employees.

On-farm assessments and industry aerial surveys conducted today determined that flood waters have reached portions of our farms in at least three locations. We know that, in these same locations, animals were moved in advance of the storm or are continuing to receive attention from farmers. In many locations, trucks have been able to continue to move animals in response to the flooding.

Given that record-shattering flooding is forecast to persist for days, we expect additionally affected farms. We do not anticipate severe impacts to the vast majority of the more than 2,100 permitted farms in the state. There are no reported breaches of treatment lagoons and no reported instances of lagoon contents spilling out, known as overtopping.

We are saddened that Hurricane Florence has caused the loss of human life and has so broadly impacted state, county and municipal infrastructure, civic properties, and homes and businesses across Eastern North Carolina. This impact includes all sectors of crop and livestock agriculture.

Many hog farmers continue to assist with the ongoing emergency response in their communities, and we are grateful for their efforts. Additionally, we are thankful for the outpouring of support and prayers from across the nation for our farmers.

We urge caution and context from the news media when reporting about our farmers.

### **A note of caution**

In advance of the storm, and since its onset, the North Carolina Pork Council has seen widespread instances of inaccurate reporting in the media about the pork industry in the state. **For example, on Sunday, Sept. 16, the Associated Press published and distributed nationally a photograph that labeled two garages as a hog farm.** In previous years, we have seen photos of municipal waste plants, poultry houses and other agricultural facilities inaccurately labeled as pig farms. We have seen barns that have been empty for multiple years characterized as active hog farms. We urge caution, especially in a breaking news environment where initial information is often inaccurate. It is precisely in these first hours and days that activists with an agenda seek to exploit the media – or the media simply gets it wrong. Our request: Beware of what you hear about hog farms during Hurricane Florence.

### **Examples**

**On Sunday, Sept. 16, 2018, the AP falsely called two garages a hog farm:**



**In 2016, the Washington Post falsely called a municipal treatment facility a hog farm:**



GOOGLE EARTH



THE WASHINGTON POST

Sources: North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources and National Weather Service

## Additional information

Hog farms & hurricanes: <http://www.ncpork.org/primer/>

Matthew, and buyouts: <http://www.ncpork.org/buyout/>

Beware of misleading agendas: <http://www.ncpork.org/beware/>

The storm's threat: <http://www.ncpork.org/concern/>

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**ADVISORY – SEPT. 16, 2018 – 9 P.M.**

Hog farmers in North Carolina are watching with great concern the rising flood waters brought by the historic impact of Hurricane Florence. Efforts continue in affected areas to provide feed and care for animals, and fuel to power farms, while ensuring safety for our farm families and farm employees.

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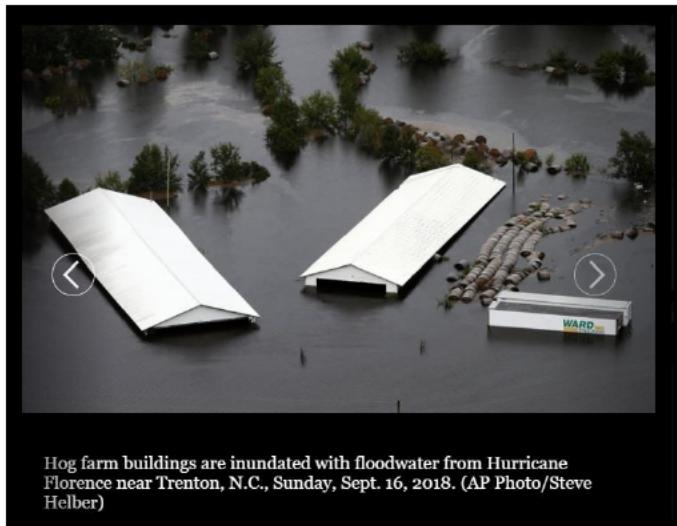
**A note of caution**

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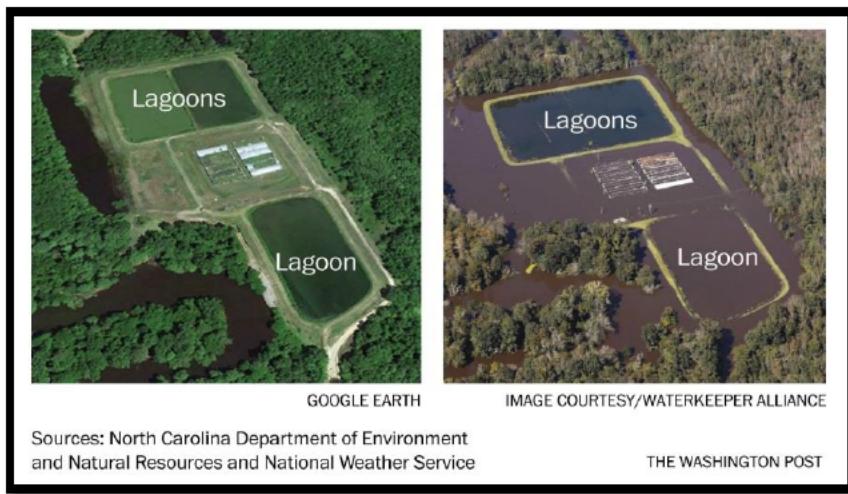
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## Examples

On Sunday, Sept. 16, 2018, the AP falsely called two garages a hog farm:



In 2016, the Washington Post falsely called a municipal treatment facility a hog farm:



### Additional information

Hog farms & hurricanes: <http://www.ncpork.org/primer/>

Matthew, and buyouts: <http://www.ncpork.org/buyout/>

Beware of misleading agendas: <http://www.ncpork.org/beware/>

The storm's threat: <http://www.ncpork.org/concern/>

**From:** Andy Curliss  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 12, 2018 12:47 PM  
**To:** Andy Curliss  
**BCC:** Starling, Raymond - OSEC, Washington, DC  
**Subject:** NC Pork Council blog post on threat of this storm

**Link:** <http://www.ncpork.org/concern/>

**Headline: The threat of this storm**

Posted on [September 12, 2018](#)

For nearly two decades, I was a journalist and was usually among those dispatched to cover incoming hurricanes.

I saw firsthand the devastation that these storms can cause, and I'm grateful for the hard work being done by so many to prepare for Hurricane Florence.

I have seen farmers this week working relentlessly to make sure they have the necessary supplies on hand to care for animals and protect their farms. I've seen harvesting of crops well into night, knowing much of the corn not picked now will be lost. And I know that a dry August growing period has led to low lagoon levels on our farms – such that we can handle 25 to 30 inches of rain in the lagoons.

I also know that, despite the headlines of the past day or so, the environmental threat from the hurricane is not from hog farmers. The data tells us that.

We should be much more concerned about the municipal treatment plants, which fail in even routine rain events.

**Effects in Matthew and Floyd**

On just one day in 2016 during Matthew, the municipal plants spilled more than 100 million gallons of raw human sewage into the state's waterways.

Over an eight-day span in the storm, municipal plants released more than 150 million gallons of sewage into the waters of the state.

Toilet paper from these plants littered the trees like little pieces of confetti.

Two decades ago, Floyd was even worse — 209 municipal and industrial wastewater treatment sites were impacted.

Problems with eight municipal systems continued more than a month later.

Thousands of septic systems failed. More than 200 caskets were unearthed. More than 3,500 underground storage tanks failed, sending sheets of oil and chemicals into the floodwaters.

Five Superfund sites flooded.

We had farms flooded, too, and there's a well-known story of one farmer calling officials to ask the state to please come get the waters of the state off his farm.

I saw much of it firsthand. I spent days in Duplin County. It wasn't pretty, but the problem wasn't the hog farms.

In Matthew and Floyd, a very small fraction (less than 2%) of our farms was affected. Still, our industry has taken significant steps since Floyd to lessen such impacts, including closing farms and lagoons in the most flood-prone areas. That work [continues](#) to this day.

Government officials understand all this, by the way, and are concerned about what may happen as the plants and other facilities are impacted.

And yet, there are [activist groups](#) already using this coming storm to advance their anti-agriculture agenda, and a willing and receptive media is going along.

We don't know what will happen next, but we should be proud of the preparations already taken.

Farms that may flood in this storm will not have animals on them – because of [our preparation](#).

### **Let's all stay safe**

Beginning sometime tomorrow, the rains will start to fall.

We know this storm will cause significant flooding – and some of that water will [surround our farms or inundate](#) some of us.

Many of our farmers are volunteer firefighters, and will be out while it is still coming. And while you are working to help your community recover, the activists say they will be devoting their time and resources to attack hog farms instead of helping those in need. Yes, while you are keeping your animals fed, and your farms powered, activists will be flying through the air looking for ammunition to use against our farmers. It is shameful.

A last word about staying safe.

During storms like this, most deaths are the result of inland flooding. So, please be safe and smart. Do not drive through moving water. Turn around. Moving water can – and will – take your life.

Think for a moment as well about where flood waters were in Matthew and Floyd. If you saw water in your house in those storms, expect it from Florence – and then some. Add a foot, to be safe.

We hope the forecasts are off.

As this storm beats down on us, let's continue to keep our heads down and focus on what's ahead.

We are grateful for all you have done to prepare ahead of this historic storm, and we are thankful for everything you do to help your neighbors and communities.

— Andy Curliss, CEO

**From:** Andy Curliss  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 18, 2018 9:59 PM  
**To:** Andy Curliss  
**BCC:** Starling, Raymond - OSEC, Washington, DC  
**Subject:** Statement by NC Pork Council - Sept. 18 at 9:30 p.m.

**LINK:**

<http://www.ncpork.org/advisory7/>

**STATEMENT – SEPT. 18, 2018, at 9:30 p.m.**

In North Carolina, we raise about 8.9 million pigs on 2,100 farms. Our farmers took extraordinary measures in advance of this storm, including moving thousands of animals out of harm's way as the hurricane approached.

The storm's impact was felt deeply across a very large region, and the approximately 5,500 losses reported by the NCDA&S Emergency Programs and Veterinary Services divisions were the result of all aspects of the storm, including wind damage and flooding. We are saddened by this outcome.

We do not expect the losses to increase significantly, though floodwaters continue to rise in some locations and circumstances may change. Our farmers are working tirelessly now amid persistent and severe logistical challenges to continue the delivery of feed, to ensure power is operating on farms (as many use wells for water), and to reach the barns to provide proper animal husbandry. We believe deeply in our commitment to provide care for our animals amid these incredibly challenging circumstances.

We wish to also acknowledge the tremendous outpouring of support for our farmers from across the nation.

**Losses in historic storm events**

Hurricane Floyd, 1999: 21,000  
 Hurricane Matthew, 2016: 2,800  
 Hurricane Florence, 2018: 5,500 (Sept. 18 by NCDA&S)

**N.C. Swine Inventory (June 2018)**

Under 50 pounds: 3.3 million (37%)  
 50-119 pounds: 1.7 million (19%)  
 120-179 pounds: 1.7 million (19%)  
 180+ pounds: 1.3 million (15%)  
 Breeding Stock: 900,000 (10%)  
 Total: 8.9 million

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**From:** Andy Curliss  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 19, 2018 4:36 PM  
**To:** Andy Curliss  
**BCC:** Starling, Raymond - OSEC, Washington, DC  
**Subject:** Update - 4 p.m.  
**Attachments:** NC Pork Council Advisory 8.pdf

LINK:  
<http://www.ncpork.org/advisory8/>

PDF Attached.

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**ADVISORY – SEPT. 19, 2018, at 4 p.m.**

Five days after Hurricane Florence struck North Carolina, most of our 2,100 hog farms are returning to normal operations. For a small portion of farms, logistical challenges amid record levels of flooding continue as hog farmers and partner production companies are taking extraordinary steps to ensure animal care. In many cases, this means farmers have remained at the barns for days without access to the outside world because they are remaining with their animals. In others, farmers are accessing the barns by boat and, in a few cases, farmers and employees have shuttled to barns by helicopter to reach the animals. The size of the area impacted by the hurricane that involves our operations is across 14 counties, the total size of which is larger than the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined.

**Feed**

Most farms pre-stocked with feed ahead of the storm, but power outages and other failures have knocked some automatic feed systems off-line. This is a temporary setback and workers are delivering feed by the bucket or cartload. In some cases, meals are being rationed to stretch the feed out. In some instances, feed bins were knocked over, which makes the feed unusable, so efforts are being made to deliver feed by whatever means necessary (tractor, helicopter, trucks, boats, etc.).



*Farm workers in Sampson County delivering feed (left) and hand feeding in Columbus County (right).*

(continued)



*Delivering feed through treacherous conditions in Sampson County (left) and Wayne County (right)*

### **Power**

Each farm has backup generators that are tested weekly, but in some cases, they were overwhelmed by the storm. Generators are used to provide water, for automatic feed systems, and to provide automatic ventilation, which is crucial to maintaining comfortable temperatures. Companies are working overtime to restore power. We are grateful for the hard work being provided by local utility companies and many others from across the nation who are assisting to restore power as quickly as possible to our rural areas.

### **Lagoons**

While it is clear that farmers properly managed lagoon levels in advance of the storm, a small percentage of lagoons have been impacted by the record-setting rainfalls. Farmers are in regular communication with the state Department of Environmental Quality and plans of action are being implemented in coordination with the regulatory agency. In some cases, lagoon levels are being lowered by transferring liquids off the farm in tanker trucks or by piping to other lagoons with ample capacity.



*Tanker trucks are lined up to remove liquids from a lagoon in Sampson County.*

We are currently aware of the following impacts to lagoons:

- As of this posting, [State DEQ is reporting](#) five sites with possible structural damages, three of which we believe to be breached. Two of the lagoons lost liquids and the solids remain. We do not have information about the third.
- Twenty-one lagoons were inundated by flood waters.
- Seventeen lagoons were at capacity due to rainfall and appear to have overtopped. Others are at capacity and efforts are being taken to respond within state regulations and guidance.

Most of the 2,100 farms with more than 3,300 anaerobic treatment lagoons in the state did not see these significant impacts from the storm. However, at this time, we still expect there could be additional impacts to be reported as conditions warrant.

While we are dismayed by the release of some liquids from some lagoons, we also understand that what has been released from the farms is the result of a once-in-a-lifetime storm and that the contents are highly diluted with rainwater. We believe that the result of this storm will be similar to what has occurred in previous events, including what the state Division of Water Resources found after Hurricane Matthew: “...the amount of water discharged into the river basins resulted in a diluting effect, which primarily resulted in lower than normal concentrations of various pollutants.” [Link to the complete report.](#)

The National Weather Service announced that it estimates more than [8 trillion gallons of water](#) fell across North Carolina over a five-day period.